

Persephone : A Conversation with Lauren Clay | Interview by Rhiannon Harper | Spring Journal

Although Lauren Clay is based in New York, she travelled to Peckham in South-East London to personally install her first UK solo exhibition 'Persephone' at Bosse & Baum, located inside the Bussey Building.

When visiting the exhibit in March, I found that stepping into such a psychically oriented space from a simple brick and concrete lane, created the effect of slipping into an alternate realm. Lauren achieves this through her consideration towards the mechanics of gallery space and the human mind. At first, you might think the wall is pouring itself out at you, when your eyes shift, and all of a sudden, it's welcoming you to step inside. It took me walking a couple of loops around the gallery to come up close to the walls; there was something enigmatic, yet intimidating, about their presence. Upon my inspection, I discovered the wall *was* coming out. This is Lauren's unique compounding of printmaking and sculpture, which creates an effective optical mirage. The bright orange and lilac interlocking and fluctuating across the white space create even further ocular distraction. With liminality in mind, I turned to face the doorway I had walked through: this boundary marked spatial limits of Bosse & Baum, whose walls were rippling with Clay's artistry. I couldn't help but get the impression that I was standing inside of a pocket universe, looking out through the portal.

I spoke to Lauren through email, attempting to excavate her thought process behind an exhibition that pivots around liminality and perception.

SJ: The title of the exhibition is 'Persephone' after the Greek Mythical figure and queen of the underworld.

What about her inspired this work? Where did the concept arise from?

LC: Last year I had an important dream located in a type of underworld. I'll spare you the details but, after having the dream, I became fixated on the mythological story of Persephone and her descent into the underworld. There are many aspects to her story... her abduction and forced marriage, the separation from her mother, her loss of innocence, etc., but for me, the real attraction to the story is the location of the underworld itself and the Jungian symbolism of looking into the unconscious or to one's own shadow.

In Jungian terms, the underworld is similar to the unconscious mind... it's everything that lies below perceivable reality. This includes everything dark about ourselves and our culture, including everything so hidden from the conscious mind that we can't even know it's there. This hidden realm exists regardless of whether or not as individuals we are brave enough to descend to gaze at it.

This idea of descent or ego death coincides with my interest in the psychedelic experience. I'm also interested in Persephone because of her connection to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

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